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C O N F I D E N T I A L ROME 002875

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/22/2014

TAGS: [PREL](#) [KPAL](#) [IS](#) [IT](#) [EU](#) [UNGA](#)

SUBJECT: ITALY WARNS AGAINST MARGINALIZATION OF THE EU IN THE QUARTET

REF: A. USUN 1677

[1](#)B. ROME 2763

Classified By: DCM Emil Skodon for reasons 1.5 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. The Italian MFA warned that US "acquiescence" in Israel's efforts to exclude the European Union from engagement in the peace process is undermining the EU's credibility in the region, which will impede progress on the Roadmap and serve to further the divide between the Israelis and Palestinians. Our MFA contacts argued that Italy has striven to bridge the gap both between the conflicting parties and within the EU, and they urged Washington to include the EU in its initiatives from the beginning or risk condemning the Quartet to irrelevance. End summary.

[1](#)2. (C) At a July 21 luncheon hosted by DCM Skodon for key players in the MFA's Middle East Bureau, Director General (NEA A/S-equivalent) Riccardo Sessa said that the US is allowing Israel to exclude the European Union from any discussion of security and political issues in the Peace Process. He charged that Israel seems to want the EU involved only when it comes time to open its wallet. This approach not only undermines the EU's credibility with the Palestinians and the Quartet's efforts to implement the Roadmap, but also increases skepticism among EU states that the Quartet is more than a cloak for a process determined only by Israel and the US.

[1](#)3. (C) Sessa and Eastern Med Office Director Luca Ferrari cited three specific cases:
-- Israel's refusal to engage with EU interlocutors;
-- Recent security-related meetings involving the US, Russia, Israel and Palestinians, but not the EU;
-- The July 21 AP report of a planned meeting in October among the US, Egypt, Israel and the Palestinians. (Note: Embassy subsequently informed Ferrari, per Department press guidance, that the AP report is without foundation).

[1](#)4. (C) Sessa said the US could not continue to take initiatives, or simply to endorse Israeli initiatives, and then expect the EU to follow up ("clean the dishes") with the necessary financial resources. Washington, he stressed, must involve the EU in its efforts to move the Roadmap forward, otherwise the Palestinians, with whom EU countries have traditionally enjoyed more confidence, will begin to view the EU as an impotent player and thus lose faith in the peace process.

[1](#)5. (C) Sessa and Ferrari described how this dynamic had affected the EU position on the UNGA resolution, approved the previous day, on the ICJ advisory opinion. Germany, normally sensitive to Israeli positions, had been unusually silent and virtually ready to accept the Palestinian text first tabled. As a result, the UK, Netherlands and Italy had been lonelier in their determination to insist on amendments to the text. Israel recognized that Italy had made an effort: an Israeli radio broadcast the same day had reportedly singled out Italy and the UK for their efforts to amend the draft. The new Italian Ambassador to Israel, Sandro de Bernadin, on presenting his credentials July 21, got an earful of criticism directed at the EU, but also appreciation for Italy's attempt to re-balance the EU approach. However, Sessa continued, the US needed to recognize the limits to the ability of any EU member to stand up for Israel's legitimate concerns. As more EU members came to doubt whether Israel took the EU's Quartet membership seriously, the usual pressure to come to EU consensus would inevitably overwhelm the ability of the UK, Italy or any other state to insist on a balanced position.

[1](#)6. (C) Sessa said the Italians recognize that Israel's escalating demonization of the European Union has much to do with Israeli domestic politics. It is the US, he argued, that should realize that this trend will inevitably cause EU political opinion to turn against continued involvement in the Quartet. This would undo what Italy regards as its own successful efforts (during its EU Presidency last year), and the Dutch intention currently, to make the EU a more balanced and impartial player between Israel and the Palestinians.

Sessa emphasized that the US could take steps right now to improve the image of the EU as a serious member of the Quartet.

17. (C) In reply to the Italian arguments, DCM and poloffs explained that it remained USG policy to implement the Roadmap under the auspices of all members of the Quartet, including the EU. If EU members felt they were losing credibility with Israel, they should ask themselves what concrete steps they could take to prove to the Israelis that Europe continued to make vital contributions to advancing the peace process. We urged the Italians to help convince the Palestinians not to divert energy toward maneuvering for empty victories in the UN when it could be better spent on working toward practical measures to smooth the proposed Gaza transition.

18. (C) Comment. The Berlusconi government prides itself on having developed a closer relationship with Israel and on having led the EU to adopt a more balanced approach to the conflict. In addition to securing EU support for designating Hamas as a terrorist organization during the Italian EU presidency, Italy has consistently been, along with the UK, one of the stalwarts in seeking more balance in the repeated UNGA resolutions against Israel. Our MFA interlocutors clearly are frustrated that their efforts are being undermined by what they perceive as US acceptance in Israel's exclusion of the EU in key negotiations. End comment.

19. (C) On other issues: Sessa said he had spoken that morning with Nimmer Hammad, the long-time Palestinian representative to Italy, about the situation in Gaza. He said Hammad had never seemed so discouraged at the internal Palestinian situation, and had no clue as to how Arafat could resolve it. Sessa said that all of the EU recognizes the need to give Arafat a tough message on ceding real authorities to others; even French FM Barnier had done so during last week's call on Arafat. It remains difficult to deliver this message effectively because of the US (and Italian) position discouraging direct contact with him. Ferrari added his judgment that the Palestinians' post-Arafat scenario would not only be bloody between Hamas and Arafat, but also among the various Fatah-related factions. Sessa noted Italy still views Sharon's Gaza plan as viable and something that "needs to be done in any case."

10. (U) Postscript: In a July 23 front-page editorial in leading daily Corriere della Sera, Foreign Minister Frattini explains Italy's vote in favor of the ICJ resolution. He defends construction of the "wall" as a reasonable measure against a vicious terrorist threat, but says Italy and the EU cannot accept that it is built on Palestinian territory. Court opinions and UNGA resolutions, he says, cannot resolve issues that must be addressed through politics and dialogue. If the EU wants to have a serious role in the peace process, it must be "equidistant" between Israel and Palestine; "otherwise, Europe will condemn itself to a marginal role and the destiny of peace will be entrusted solely to the US."

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